

Naval War College Review

Volume 23
Number 5 May

Article 2

1970

President's Notes: Challenge!

Richard G. Colbert
U.S. Navy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Colbert, Richard G. (1970) "President's Notes: Challenge!," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 23 : No. 5 , Article 2.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol23/iss5/2>

This President's Forum is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

CHALLENGE!



Recent trends in domestic and international affairs have brought about a reassessment of our foreign policy posture. From this reassessment has evolved the Nixon Doctrine, one of the most definitive public statements on foreign policy enunciated by a President. Under the Nixon Doctrine, our foreign policy will take a new direction, one which will have far-reaching implications for our Armed Forces and particularly the Navy. It is important that every naval officer understand the evolution of the Nixon Doctrine and its implications for the service.

The traumatic effect of the war in Vietnam has caused the realization that there are indeed limitations to American power. The coincident domestic social crisis has made the American people aware of the limitations of our economic and financial resources. Together these factors have caused considerable introspection and self-searching about our national goals and the future role of the United States in the world. The result has been a general reordering of national priorities away from heavy external involvement and toward domestic concerns. Consequently, it has become incumbent upon the Nixon administration to reduce our global presence without sacrificing the security of American and free world interests so as to reach a degree of harmony between conflicting demands. The President's words at Guam a year ago have found formal expression in the Nixon Doctrine which was fully expounded in his recent "State of the World" message.

The essence of the Nixon Doctrine is that responsibility for international security should be shared. In the words of the President, "Peace requires partnership." Retrenchment toward isolationism has been denied and the assertion made that the United States will be faithful to its treaty commitments. However, implementation of the Nixon Doctrine will entail a reduction in our general purpose forces with which to support those commitments. Secretary Laird has stated in the *Defense Program and Budget for FY 1971* that an important objective of the new strategy is smaller, more mobile, and more efficient general purpose forces that will neither cast the United States in the role of world policeman nor force the Nation into a new isolationism.

I believe the Nixon Doctrine is a realistic approach to our foreign policy. It is consistent with the times. Long-neglected domestic problems are clamoring for more attention and deserving of it. Inflationary pressures dictate reductions in Government expenditures. And the condition of our allies has changed dramatically from that of 25 years ago. These nations have strengthened their economic, political, and social fiber. Their capacity for self-defense has grown commensurately as has their self-confidence and national pride. Very importantly, they have become willing to do more for themselves.

2 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

The Nixon Doctrine has, however, been postulated in the face of a changing balance of power between the United States and the Soviet Union. This is evident in the status of our strategic forces. The U.S.S.R. has recently achieved a position of parity with the United States in numbers of land-based ICBM's, and Secretary Laird has stated that they could achieve a first strike capability by the mid-1970s. This shift is even more apparent on the oceans of the world. The unprecedented Soviet maritime expansion over the past two decades makes cooperation with our allies a matter of high priority if we are to counter successfully the Soviet use of seapower as an effective instrument of foreign policy against free world interests.

Therefore the Nixon Doctrine has particular significance to naval officers all over the world. Among the most pressing needs of the free world is that of compensating for the increasing pressures of the Soviet Union against the sea lines of communications which bind us together. An enlarged role for all of our allied navies is needed.

Reinforcing the urgency of gaining the support and cooperation of our allies is the inevitable decline in the U.S. naval presence. We are moving toward a smaller, higher quality navy. About 58 percent of our warships are over 19 years old and will be facing the prospect of inactivation shortly. It is unlikely, given our new national priorities and the inflationary condition of our economy, that those ships will be replaced at a better than 1- to 3- or 1- to 2-rate. On a strictly mathematical basis, it will no longer be possible for the U.S. Navy to "show the flag" in various world sea areas as it has in the past two decades.

At the Seapower Symposium, which was recently hosted at the Naval War College with the naval leaders of 38 free world countries participating, it was evident that the smaller navies are eager to assume a larger role in maintaining

freedom of the seas and protecting merchant shipping in their local areas. They have been quick to recognize the new challenge posed to them—to all of us—by the rapidly expanding offensive capabilities of the Soviet Navy. They see the urgent need for a combined defense against this challenge. Although they are certainly enthusiastic to participate, the capability to expand significantly the scope of their operations is, with some exceptions, sadly deficient; many lack the ability to contribute meaningfully.

As one spokesman from a smaller foreign navy noted at the symposium, "Spirit, leadership, and determined effort are not enough—we cannot hope to motivate our young men to devote themselves to sea service as a career if that service must be carried out in old, technologically deficient ships." From this aspect, the Nixon Doctrine and its corollary requirement for a new approach to aid to our allies come at a most appropriate time, and none too soon.

With our encouragement, regional naval institutions can evolve, but they will indeed be hollow unless the participating navies are given material and technical assistance to develop their forces. Commitment to an institution stems in no small measure from a sense of meaningful participation. This is the essence of the Nixon Doctrine.

During the symposium, many of the foreign naval leaders expressed interest in the warships we were about to inactivate, and many discussions concerned possible applications of the vessels to the smaller navies. Since that time, several of those warships were indeed sold to our smaller allies.

It is true that our old destroyers, due to be decommissioned, are not up to the challenges of today, much less tomorrow and the years ahead. They are virtually incapable of sustained high tempo (30-knot) operations and distant deployments required by our Navy. As far as we are concerned, their useful life

has about ended. However, their life could be considerably extended if they were provided to the navies of our smaller allies. Frequent inport time, proximity to repair facilities, and low tempo operations in local sea areas are characteristic of the missions these navies are assigned to fulfill. Our old warships are still very capable of this type of operation.

How much better to have them stay in the free world inventory of active ships, rather than be inactivated at a time when the balance of power at sea is so critical!

However, material assistance in the form of our old warships is not the ultimate solution. As was brought out at the symposium, the smaller navies of our allies have a need for a relatively small, rugged, reliable, and inexpensive escort-type ship as well as various types of smaller craft to perform more specific missions and lend additional flexibility to their operating forces. Secretary of Defense Laird recently stated:

This new policy requires that we place more emphasis on making available to our allies appropriate military equipment. Let me emphasize the word "appropriate." The weapons that are appropriate for American forces are not necessarily the same ones appropriate for some of our allies . . . We need to have equipment available which will be better suited to our allies' requirements.

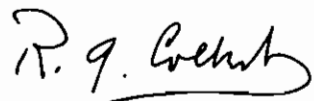
In this regard, part of the course work of the 30 senior foreign naval officers in the Naval Command Course here is to investigate the general systems require-

ments for a small escort craft suitable for use in their navies.

Our allies also need the technical training and specialized help which will enable them to make the most effective use of their forces. In the last few months, the Officer Candidate School here in Newport has initiated a program to train hundreds of young Vietnamese for commissions in their rapidly growing navy. This is the type of program, applied more broadly, which could help make the Nixon Doctrine really meaningful.

I believe the Navy should take decisive steps to recognize the enthusiasm of our allies and the high-level government support at home by expanding our program of material and technical assistance to our smaller allies. Deputy Secretary Packard in discussing "a new approach to foreign aid" has stated,

It is clearly in our own self-interest to proceed with these programs to establish and maintain the military strength our foreign friends need for their own defense. Unless we provide them with further assistance, the policy of lessening direct U.S. military involvement which we are placing into effect--cannot be successful.



R. G. COLBERT
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy
President, Naval War College